

Getting In Tune

Chris: I remember when that ramp dropped. That hot desert air hits you for the first time. The mortar went off fairly close to me and blasted me with sand. I didn't know what was going on. I was like, "Wow, this is real."

Name is Chris. Marine Corps. I was in from '89 to '92. My MOS, I was a 0811, so a cannoneer. Growing up as a child, the men in my life were all veterans: Grandpa, World War II; Dad, Vietnam. So I just figured if you're going to be a grown up, this is what you do. Don't screw up.

While we were training, Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, so shipped off to the desert. I was in my early twenties, going into hostile environment, shooting more rounds than most of these guys have seen before. Amazing what you get used to after you've been in for four years. But they don't retrain you when you get out. Bouncing between jobs, going through a divorce, I was at a pretty low point in my life. I knew that I needed to get help, and I had no idea that I could use the VA. They're like, "You can go there for your healthcare." I'm like, "Really?"

For my first visit with my primary care physician, I broke down. I broke down crying. So she set me up with a counselor. It works. When I was diagnosed with PTSD, talking about traumatic incidents gave me clarity as to the way that I was feeling. When those memories would come in, zeroing in on those was powerful.

I'll still never forget. We were all in the trucks, geared up, had my portable radio, and that Queen song was on, We Are the Champions. And literally, when the last note of the song was done, captain gets up and says, "Fire it up. Let's go." It used to be real hard for me to listen to that. My VA counselor taught me how to numb the effects of it by listening to it over and over and over and over again until you're just like, "Okay, it's just a song."

To take the time and effort to learn how to conquer it, that came from practice, that came from hard work. Music sets the tone for my mood. If I'm stressed, time to pick up the guitar. I decided I was going to make it my job to be positive, be kind to myself, and I can now also help other veterans by sharing my journey with them. I'm a happier person, a more successful person. There's help out there. I had the same counselor for, gosh, 15 years. I take advantage of it every chance that I get. VA Team has changed my life. Man, it's awesome.



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